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## OUR FOREIGN ARTISTIC IMPORTATIONS.



BESIDES meeting the increasing demand for variety in decorative work the novelties in decorative devices that appear each season are in many instances suggestive of fresh ideas and important adaptations. Judging by the season's arrivals in this line from abroad there appears a sort of concurrence among designers in Europe to adhere less to strictly conventionalised renderings, and aim more generally at realistic treatment. Thus we have flowers and fruits represented as they appear in nature, variously modified by the processes and the materials of the ornamentist, and groups of figures delineated on a flat surface or moulded in the round supply accessories to or constitute the chief features of articles of vertu. In this veering of fashion, ceramics have undoubtedly led the way.

The imposing character of this season's exhibits of foreign ceramic ware were never surpassed. Oriental porcelain is well nigh outshone by the less elaborate but more varied and tasteful designers of Europe. The greatest triumph is perhaps in porcelain of England and France, which long since ceased to conform exclusively to oriental models or to be characterised by an affected style. The best examples are not only valuable for their mechanical and manipulative excellence but for abounding with enamel paintings frequently of a most delicate and charming style of coloring. Specimens of Palissy ware are to be met with that display, in rustic pieces, groups of beings mostly drawn from lowly life, often with accessories of marine objects showing admirable composition and moulding. In a set of plates we find the borders composed of open work of classic and other common flowers. Much of the new majolica ware approaches in artistic merit the qualities that secured its ancient fame in design, color and glaze. Instead of grotesques, caprices and landscapes such subjects as figure paintings are reproduced and bird and animal figures, foliage and flowering plants, partly or wholly in the round are more generally presented.

A fine example of earthenware manufacture presents remarkable and unique features both as to the method of execution and the designs. The material is a fine white pipe clay, on which the ornamental pattern is incised, filled up with colored pastes and then thinly varnished over. The style is that of the Renaissance, very delicately designed and executed with much that is of oriental character in the interlaced patterns. Some fine examples of colored bisque ware are in candelabras with cupids and other figures about their stems and roses with pink and white leaves *a la nature* scattered at varying distances along the rustic branches. The beauty of the flowers is such as to condone the artificial conjunction. Let us be satisfied with the grace and beauty without the artistic unity. The figure subjects are countless. Designers of soft and hard porcelain revel in the ideal, and we find rendered with admirable skill such subjects as a bivouac of cupids, sleeping nymph and satyrs, a lady's toilette, a young girl with a dove, rioters cavaliers and other delineations without number.

The peculiar stoneware known as Delft, and which was first made in the Flemish provinces more than three centuries ago, does not seem to have found much acceptance in this country. The two leading kinds are the drinking cups of one color, ornamented with flowing foliage, figures, &c., and the Grès de Flanders with figures, stamped armorial devices and other ornaments. Some of the jugs have a bearded mask below the spout.

In much of the ceramic ware of Central Europe we find exemplified national and local influences that assert themselves from generation to generation undisturbed by changes elsewhere. The Teplitz ware in terra-cotta has a character of its own suggesting an Asiatic origin, in spiral forms and oblique bands and the extreme minutive or relief ornament. The exhibits including vases, with heads of birds for paws, and pierced work, and a variety of fanciful devices, are in warm subdued colors, golden brown prevailing, other hues being mainly deep red and gray, maroon and light green, claret and buff. The ornamental bands are seen at times overlapping but never interlacing. We admire the colors, so bold, so soft and freely distributed, left to the shadows of the relief work for any gradation in other tones. With all the fantasies in the designs they are manifestly brought within some

traditional rule which gives to all the pieces a certain family appearance.

The ambition of the English and French manufacturers of table cut glass is manifestly to excel in clearness combined with crystalline brilliancy, and gracefulness of outline. The art in these respects makes manifest progress. There is, however, one quality in glass yet to be attained—the buried secret of the old Venetian masters—the lightness they achieved. In colored glass, and in enamelled glass such as ewers and caskets for the boudoir, there is much of elegant design and execution. In successful imitation of the ancient Venetian latticino of ancient times,—small milk white and colored threads inclosed in the glass, we meet with tazzas, goblets and other articles. The secret of the process lies in placing the threads between two layers of white glass and fusing them together. In Venice work in such threads was known as *vitro di trina* (lace work) but the old Venetian masters, by some process now unknown, formed little air bubbles between each mesh, and attained a minuteness in the threads and a delicacy and exactness now unapproached. The mode by which the Venetians enclosed ornamental patterns in gold particles fused into the glass is a lost art.

The antique Thuringian "ivory" shows in force among recent importations in busts and animal and other figures, the latter attached to such articles as hunting horns, etc., which besides have ornaments incised. The composition closely resembles ivory even to the mellowness of age, and the simulation is further improved by darkening the incised lines. Spanish galleys in silver are freighted with cigars; an electric bulb is incased in a globe of seashells; and the frame of a painting is beautifully inlaid with coral; copper dishes coated with deep red enamel are adorned with wild flowers in gold and silver in relief, rims decorated in raised gold work of the Byzantine style. Terra cotta dogs to adorn the hearth are extremely natural.

There is a complete revival of pictorial enameling on metal. What glories does the art not recall from the Byzantine cloisonné to the broader style of art of the early Limoges school in which surface painted enamels received their first development, and the translucent enamels of Italy from the 13th to the 15th century—enamels in bas-relief and in almost every color laid in thin coatings on the incised metal the lines of which shone through—work that has never been excelled.

In metal work, as showing originality and also as suggestive in the way of design, we may note a bronze vase, that has the upper portion of the base encircled by projecting leaves of water plants and grasses, colored after nature, and bending outwards as if swayed by the wind. A metallic basket, imitative of woven work, has two birds of terra-cotta, of brilliant plumage perched on the handle, producing a novel and lightsome effect. Amongst novelties is a globular jeweled lamp for table, made of tin and pierced from inside with geometric figures, being suspended on a curved steel wire.

Bronze tableaux in relief for suspension on the wall, and mainly produced in Germany, are remarkable on the whole for their fine grouping, felicity in expression of countenance and naturalness of gesture. They are well fitted for mural adornments particularly of the hall and library. Not a few are replicas of celebrated paintings.

Mantel clocks always form a standard importation. Amongst these is one embedded in porcelain scroll work in color and gilt, having a band of nymphs at base joined hand in hand and in an advancing dance—symbolising the passing hours. The band emerging from one side seems to disappear at the other, and so to encircle the clock. On the cornice to the right, an infant holding a bunch of grapes with his left hand is reaching upwards with his right to gather another cluster. On the left cornice a child is bending over with a garland of flowers to the nymphs. At each side of another mantel clock in architectural frame and admirably moulded and colored, are two figures supporting structural ornaments.

In various objects of utility fanciful construction is not wanting. Thus we find miniature rustic cottages doing service for a lady's workbasket; an old fashioned windmill constitutes a pin-holder rack; a smokers table has the aspect of a lumber yard with its stacked piles, the logs being of ebony and the top layers faced with silver. Another such table is a corner street scene, side pavement and lamp included, with a hand wagon en route, a barking dog, and a boy leaping over a stump.



ORNAMENTAL PANEL MADE BY THE SPURR VENEER CO.